Gravesham Borough Council

Council Size Submission

March 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Local Government Boundary Commission has identified Gravesham Borough Council as a local authority that requires a review of its electoral arrangements for two key reasons. The first is that it has been almost twenty years since the council had its last review in 2001. Secondly, there is an evident level of electoral imbalance across the borough which breaches the acceptable 'levels of equality' endorsed by the Local Government Boundary Commission. As such, a review needs to be undertaken to ensure this position is rectified.

The current position in Gravesham when measured against the Commission's criteria for electoral equality shows that there are six wards within the borough that have a variance of greater than +/-10% in terms of electoral representation which means that the total number of electors per councillor is either higher or lower than the average.

To ensure a collaborative approach across all parties represented in Gravesham, the Leader of the Executive formed a Cross-party Working Group comprising himself and the Leaders of the Conservative and Independent Groups. The Working Group recognised the need to rebalance the electoral equality across the borough, whilst also taking the opportunity to review the way in which the governance arrangements of the council operate.

All Members have been engaged in the process through presentations from the Local Government Boundary Commission as well as having the opportunity to provide their own thoughts for consideration as part of a Member survey on community representation.

Summary of Council-size Proposal

This submission sets out the Council's proposal to seek a reduction in the number of Borough Councillors from 44 to 39, a reduction of five (11.4%) elected representatives. It is felt that whilst this reduction is not only 'manageable', it will lead to more robust member engagement in the council's committee process, as set out in this submission.

As part of the review process, the Council has sought to establish a robust evidence-base, which has enabled the Cross-party Working Group to make a fully informed decision about the council size submission for Gravesham. In reaching their decision as a collective, the Member Cross-party Working Group considered:

- The nature of the council's current governance arrangements, reflecting the streamlined approach that is already in place in terms of the Committee Structure;
- The opportunity to reduce membership on Cabinet Committees, which currently have a large pool of Members attending; membership on these committees could be reduced;
- Changes that have taken place in the past twenty years both in terms of requirements for community representation but also the methods in which this can now take place; and
- Consideration of future working arrangements and priorities for both the constituents in the borough and the elected Members.

Whilst supportive of the reduction in the number of elected representatives across the borough, the Cross-party Working Group is keen to emphasise the need for true representation across all council wards.

In finalising this submission, the Cross-party Working Group is keen to work with the Local Government Boundary Commission on the second stage of the review in determining the future electoral warding patterns for the borough.

INTRODUCTION AND PROFILE OF GRAVESHAM

Gravesham: Overview

Gravesham is a vibrant and culturally rich borough located in North West Kent, renowned for its physical and social diversity.

Through its location adjacent to the River Thames, the borough presents a distinguished maritime history which has played a significant role in the socio-economic fortunes of the area over time and, in turn, helped shape the community identity of those river-based wards.

As an area covering 105 square kilometres (40 square miles), the borough has a striking urban-rural split, primarily divided by the A2 road. The land to the north of the A2, approximately 20% of the borough, is urban-based and home to around 80% of local residents, and is included within the 'Kent Thameside' area of the wider Thames Gateway. Conversely, the rural area to the south of the A2 and to the east of Gravesend, approximately 80% of the borough, is home to around 20% of local residents and is virtually all Green Belt land with significant landscape and biodiversity value.

Gravesham is particularly well-connected in terms of strategic transport links. In addition to the A2/M2 trunk road providing access to the M25, Greater London and the Channel Ports, the borough is bisected by the High Speed 1 railway line, linking Gravesend to London St Pancras (c25 minutes), complementing traditional rail services in the borough. There is also a regular passenger ferry service across the River Thames from Gravesend to Tilbury.

Gravesham: administration

Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) was formed on 1 April 1974 by the merger of the Municipal Borough of Gravesend with Northfleet Urban District and part of Strood Rural District, under the Local Government Act 1972. It borders the Borough of Dartford and Sevenoaks District to the west, the Borough of Tonbridge & Malling to the south, the unitary Medway Council to the east and, to the north via the River Thames, the unitary Thurrock Council in Essex.

As the largest town Gravesend is the administrative hub of the borough, with Northfleet representing the second largest urban settlement. Through its strong rural connections and identities, Gravesham is also home to six rural parish areas; Cobham, Higham, Luddesdown, Meopham, Shorne and Vigo. As an additional point of reference, the present borders of Gravesham parliamentary constituency are almost fully representative of those of the borough.

Appendix 1 presents the administrative and geographical boundaries and constraints within the borough.

To provide a framework for our work in the community, Gravesham Borough Council has adopted a Corporate Plan for the 2019-23 period with a clear ambition for the borough; *Delivering a Gravesham to be proud of.*

In seeking to deliver against that ambition, a suite of corporate objectives was established, each with its own portfolio of activities and initiatives:

- #**1 People***: a proud community; where residents can call a safe, clean and attractive borough their home.*
- #**2 Place***: a dynamic borough; defined by a vibrant and productive local economy taking advantage of growth in the area, supported by its strong and active community.*
- #**3 Progress**: *an entrepreneurial authority; commercial in outlook and committed to continuous service improvement, underpinned by a skilled workforce and strong governance environment.*

In shaping the administration of the council and its future governance environment, it is essential that this Boundary Review exercise is correctly administered. As a project that will impact the council across each of its services, the conclusions reached have the potential to directly impact delivery of the council's corporate objectives.

It is crucial therefore that the exercise identifies the right solution to both meet the needs of the authority and, equally, to enable elected Members to lead this essential work and successfully fulfil their roles within the community at a time of the upmost need.

Gravesham: demographics

Overall

The 2019 mid-year estimate – provided by the ONS – identifies that Gravesham has a resident population of 106,900, the lowest figure across Kent districts.

At a rate of 0.5%, the 2019 population estimate represents the largest annual growth outturn in the borough since 2014, albeit below the Kent (0.8%) and national (0.6%) averages. More broadly, the 2019 figure represents an increase of 11,700 (12.3%) since the last boundary review exercise in 2001, again below the equivalent Kent (19.4%) and national (14.3%) average rates of growth over the period.

Natural growth (more births than deaths) is Gravesham's primary source of population expansion, supported by inward migration to the borough. It is worth noting the distinction in terms of inward migration however, whereby in the last 10 years Gravesham has overseen more UK nationals leave than move into the borough (-1,600 reduction), the only Kent district to observe a negative net trend. This has been offset by the increased level of net inward migration to the borough via international migrants over the same period (3,400).

Density

In terms of population density, the defined urban area of the borough presents a figure of 37.43 persons / hectare – the most densely populated equivalent area across Kent districts. As a likely causal impact, Gravesham also presents the highest level of housing over-occupancy (bedrooms) in Kent (5.5%). Population density is most acute in Pelham, Singlewell and Whitehill ward areas respectively.

In considering the borough as a whole, at 10.8 people per hectare Gravesham is identified as having the third highest level of population density across Kent districts.

Differing levels of population density within electoral wards directly impact the equitable nature of Member representation. As outlined at Appendix 2, it is clear certain wards located in the defined urban area of Gravesham present the most acute levels of under-representation, or electorate variance, with Riverside ward (17%) and Northfleet South (16%) posting the highest levels of existing underrepresentation.

Age

With a resident mean average age of 39.5 years, Gravesham has a proportionately higher number of younger people and working age residents than the Kent or national average. Despite this current position however, Gravesham is a notably ageing population. When considering future population projections over the next 20 years, the highest level of growth in the borough is expected amongst those residents of retirement age; those aged 65+ are estimated to grow in numbers by 41%, whereas those aged 0-15 are proportionately projected to grow by 0.9%.

Ethnicity

Gravesham's diversity of place is reflected in its resident population. The borough has a long history of inward migration of ethnic minority groups, principally through its large Sikh population and, in recent times, through a more transient population drawn from nationals of the 'A8' European states.

On a measure of diversity based on the proportionate size of ethnic groups identified through the 2011 Census, Gravesham presents as the most diverse borough within Kent; 21.8% of residents identify as 'non-White British', with the largest resident minority groups identified as 'Indian' (7.4%), primarily of the Sikh religion, and 'other white' (principally EU immigrants) (4.6%). In terms of religion, the borough also has the largest proportion of Muslim residents in Kent at 1.9% of the population.

Projecting the Census data forward, and evidencing the scale of growth in resident diversity, in 2020 Gravesham presented with 43.2% of primary school children identifying as 'non-white British'. Within primary schools, 25.7% of Gravesham pupils were also without English as a first language, again the largest proportion in Kent.

Gravesham: challenges

As a borough, Gravesham is one of significant socio-economic disparity and high levels of resident inequality.

Gravesham's economic profile points to a legacy of low-skilled employment and a dependence on now declining economic sectors, specifically manufacturing through historical river-based heavy industry. Gravesham presents much lower levels of higher professional occupations than Kent or national averages, with only 7% of total employees classified within the knowledge sector – seen as a key driver for economic growth – a figure inside the lowest 20% of authorities nationally.

The restructuring of Gravesham's economy in recent years has played a significant role in the evident levels of deprivation in the borough. On interpreting the results of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 study, Gravesham is identified as the fifth most deprived local authority in Kent, and 119th (317) nationally. However, this overall picture masks the scale of inequality experienced by residents in the borough.

At a 'Lower Super Output Area' (LSOA), pockets of Northfleet North and Westcourt wards are within the top-10% most deprived in England, with LSOAs in Singlewell, Central and Riverside ward also featuring in Kent's top-10% most-deprived areas. Conversely, parts of rural Gravesham are within the least deprived areas nationally.

This significant contrast is particularly evident when considering life expectancy levels in the borough, where life expectancy is 13.9 years lower for men and 7.7 years lower for women between the wards with the highest life expectancy and those with the lowest. Results of the IMD 2019 exercise in the borough are available at Appendix 3.

Despite this background, there are a number of important economic regeneration and house building projects being undertaken in and around the borough. Initiatives including; Ebbsfleet Garden City, North Kent Enterprise Zone and significant town centre regeneration projects will create a wealth of new job opportunities for Gravesham residents, whilst delivery of key transport infrastructure developments will help attract inward investment.

Key socio-economic data at a Gravesham electoral ward level is presented at Appendix 4.

Conclusion: What does this mean for future council size?

The content in this section of the submission provides a feel for Gravesham as a borough. Crucially, it demonstrates the complexity of life as an elected representative; the balance of taking strategic political policy decisions to positively impact community needs, whilst effectively administering sensitive constituent issues in the face of such social challenges. More directly, the report outlines the existing inequality in community representation and the current disparity in the number of electors that each councillor represents. This is particularly apparent in certain urban wards; a situation likely to become more acute in light of projected future population growth in the borough. Collectively, this section of the report therefore presents the case for a review of Gravesham Borough Council's electoral representation to be undertaken.

In consideration of the Boundary Commission's objectives, key findings from this section are:

Boundary Commission Objectives	Gravesham Profile
Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.	• Low overall growth in the last 20 years: demonstrating a clear need for a boundary review in order to rebalance comparative inconsistencies in representation with other authority areas where larger growth has been delivered. • Significant level of growing population density within certain urban wards: evidencing the need for a review of existing ward boundaries in order to deliver electoral fairness and equality, vital in light of future population projections and their location within the borough.
Ensuring that recommendations reflect community identity.	• Largest BME population in Kent: with a further growth in resident BME population since the 2011 Census, there is a growing importance in the need to deliver a council reflective of its local population.

THE COUNCIL'S ELECTORAL CYCLE AND COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The Council currently has 44 councillors across 18 wards, which are predominately a mix of two Member and three Members, with one single Member ward. Each councillor serves a four-year term with elections held every fourth year. Councillors do not hold an individual or ward budget allocation in their area.

Governance

The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet style of governance as required by the legislation requiring most councils to adopt executive arrangements.

The Leader may take any decision, which an individual Portfolio holder could take, where the relevant Portfolio holder is unable or unwilling to take that decision. The Leader may alter the allocation of responsibilities within any Portfolio. Chief Officers may take any Executive decision which relates to the services under their control, except where the relevant Portfolio holder has instructed them not to make such a decision. Chief Officers may nominate other Officers to take decisions that they have the power to take. All decisions must be made in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution and any policies of the Council.

The Leader represents the Council in the community and on important public bodies e.g. Local Government Association and acts as the Council's primary spokesperson.

In 2019-20 the Council operated with a total of 22 committees, panels and working groups (excluding Council and Cabinet). This had been the case for several years. Committee membership is agreed each year and remains for the whole of the municipal year. Minor changes can be made through the year when necessary by approval of the full Council.

Whilst changes to legislation, national or local policy can and do have an impact on how services are delivered, they have not impacted significantly on the workload of committees. Based on this we do not see further changes impacting on committee workload or council size.

In terms of the number of meetings there were 77 meetings scheduled in 2019-20. Attendance at most meetings is excellent and it would be very rare that a meeting is inquorate. In addition, there have been no instances where the council has been unable to discharge its duties due to a lack of councillors.

The following is an outline of the governance structure:

Full Council

All forty-four elected Members are expected to attend Full Council meetings, which typically take place 5 times a year. The main role of Full Council is to determine policies as the framework for the way the Council carries out its functions and to set the budget and council tax levels.

At its Annual meeting in May, Council appoints the Mayor and deputy Mayor for the forthcoming municipal year and elects the Leader of the Council. It also appoints committees and Chairs, allocates places on them in accordance with the political balance rules and makes appointments to strategic outside bodies. Full Council also provides a platform whereby members of the public may ask questions of the Cabinet. Likewise, Members of the Council may question the Mayor, a Member of the Cabinet or the Chair of any Committee or Sub-Committee.

Cabinet

The Cabinet is responsible for most day-to-day decisions. In particular, it proposes the policy framework and budget to the Council and then carries on the work of the Council within this approved framework and budget. The vast majority of decisions are taken collectively by the Cabinet at monthly Cabinet meetings. All formal decisions to be taken by the Cabinet, Key Decisions or otherwise, are published. On the rare occasion that a decision is made by a Cabinet Member acting alone, the decisions are documented and published in line with the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules.

In the event of the Leader being unable to discharge his/her duties as Leader due to absence, the Deputy Leader shall assume those duties until the Leader is able to resume his/her duties or full Council appoints a new Leader.

The Cabinet consists of the Leader of the Council and six Cabinet Members. All seven members of the Cabinet hold a portfolio, each containing respective service areas of the council:

- **Leaders;**
  - Finance
  - Communications
  - IT Services
  - Human Resources
  - Customer Services
  - Special Projects
  - Legal Services
  - Digital
  - Property Services
  - Car Parking
  - Emergency Planning
- **Commercial Services;**
  - Commercial Activities
  - Property Investment
- **Community & Leisure;**
  - Sport Development
  - Gravesham Community Leisure
  - The Woodville
  - Market
  - Town Twinning
  - Community Engagement
  - Gr@nd
  - Arts, Heritage, Tourism
  - Community Safety
- **Housing Services;**
  - Social Housing
  - Housing Strategy & Development
  - Private Sector Housing
  - Affordable Homes
  - Repairs
  - Housing Provision
  - Rented Sector Housing
- **Operational Services**
  - Waste & Horticulture
  - Cemeteries
  - Health & Safety
  - Street Cleaning
  - Environmental Health
  - Licensing

- **Performance & Administration**
  - Revenue & Benefits
  - Counter Fraud & Audit
  - Information Governance
  - Corporate Performance
  - Corporate Change
  - Corporate Governance
- **Strategic Environment**
  - Development Management
  - Building Control
  - Planning Policy
  - Environmental Management
  - Conservation
  - Economic Development

Cabinet Members meet regularly with their relevant Director and the Leader meets with the Chief Executive on a weekly basis. The Leader also meets with each of the Directors on a weekly rotation.

Cabinet Committees

There are six Cabinet Committees each consisting of ten Members which are formed to advise the relevant Cabinet Member and help form policy direction. The committee receives reports and updates from services areas within the portfolio of the respective Cabinet Members who chair the committee. Each committee meets 5 times a year.

Regulatory Committees

The council's constitution sets out the delegation arrangements in respect of regulatory functions. The council's regulatory committees are:

- Licensing Committee (14 members)
  - deals with all Licensing functions and meets as and when required, in practice two to four times a year
- Licensing Panel (3 members)
  - Meets to consider individual cases where appropriate. Meets as and when required.
- Planning Committee (9 members)
  - To discharge the Council's functions as district planning authority meets as and when required, in practice five to seven times a year. The majority of planning applications are determined by officers, unless a ward councillor has concerns or disagrees with the case officer's recommendations, or thinks that an application maybe particularly contentious.
- Appeals Sub-Committee (3 members)
  - To hear and adjudicate on appeals against decisions made by or on behalf of the Council
- Hackney Carriage Sub-Committee (3 members)
  - To determine an appeal against the revocation of a Hackney Carriage Licence. Meets as and when required.

- Appointments Board (14 members)
    - To determine the general policies and procedures to be adopted for the recruitment to Chief Officer posts.

- Appointments Panel (3 members)
    - To determine the method of recruitment, carry out the short-listing and interviewing of applicants to Chief Officer posts.

Other Panels and Committees

Other panels and committees are:

- Standards Committee (9 Members)
    - Which meet as and when required, which in practice is rarely.

- Gravesham Joint Transportation Board (5 Members)
    - Joint committee with Kent County Council. Meets four times a year.

Scrutiny Committees

The council operates a number of committee that provide scrutiny functions:

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee (9 members)
    - examining any decision of the Cabinet, submitting reports thereon to the Council and, if appropriate, exercising the power of 'call-in'. The Committee is normally chaired by a Member of the opposition. All members are able to suggest items for the Committee to consider. The Committee is occasionally asked to take adhoc items which are not timetabled and such requests are usually agreed.

    All Members are expected to consider published Executive Decisions and the Cabinet agenda and reports. Members are expected to familiarise themselves with matters on the agenda and do any further research that they deem necessary. Members are also expected to consider and identify matters for future scrutiny.

    The Overview and Scrutiny Committee can appoint sub-committees to consider specific topics and comprise three or more Members. A maximum of three sub-committees can be operation at any one time. Once group has completed its review it will prepare a report which will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

    The Council's Scrutiny function has worked very effectively. There is a transparent approach to project delivery with updates passed back to the Cabinet for consideration. The council has an open Cabinet system where all members are invited and entitled to speak.

- Finance and Audit Committee (9 members)
    - formed to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management and internal control environment of the Council, independent scrutiny of the authority's financial and non-financial performance and oversight of financial reporting processes.

- Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee (14 members)
    - To review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions.

The Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee can appoint sub-committees to consider specific topics and comprise three or more Members. A maximum of three sub-committees can be operation at any one time. Once group has completed its review it will prepare a report which will be submitted to the Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

In addition to the Council's Scrutiny Committees, there are also a number of inter-authority partnership committees which the Council's Members attend.

Committee Membership - 2019/20 municipal year

The tables below provide a summary of the membership and attendance of committees in 2019-20:

Cabinet Bodies

Committee / Panel	Number of Members	Number of Meetings	% of attendance (overall)
Full Council	44	5	94%
Cabinet	7	9	92%

Regulatory Committees

Committee / Panel	Number of Members	Number of Meetings	% of attendance (overall)
Licensing Committee	14	2	97%
Licensing Panel	3	7	100%
Planning Committee	9	7	100%
Appeals Sub-Committee	3	1	100%
Hackney Carriage Sub-Committee	3	0	N/A
Appointments Board	14	0	N/A
Appointments Panel	3	2	100%

Scrutiny Committees

Committee / Panel	Number of Members	Number of Meetings	% of attendance (overall)
Overview Scrutiny Committee	9	6	96%
1. Review Sub-Committee	5	-	-
2. Review Sub-Committee	5	-	-
Finance & Audit Committee	9	6	93%
Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee	14	2	96%
3. Review Sub-Committee	4	-	-
4. Review Sub-Committee	4	-	-

Other Committees

Committee / Panel	Number of Members	Number of Meetings	% of attendance (overall)
Commercial Services	10	4	90%
Community & Leisure	10	5	96%
Housing Services	10	4	100%
Operational Services	10	4	86%
Performance & Administration	10	4	95%
Strategic Environment	10	4	95%
Standards Committee	9	1	89%
Gravesham Joint Transportation Board	5	4	65%

Representation on Outside Bodies – Current Position

(appointed on an annual basis unless indicated otherwise)

The council appoints to a number of outside bodies, some of which have multiple vacancies. The total number of appointments made to the outside bodies is 65. The total number of councillors involved on outside bodies is 18, of which some serve on multiple bodies.

Outside Body	Membership Level
Action with Communities in Rural Kent	2
Alzheimer's & Dementia Support Services	1
Charity of Knight's Almshouses (4 year term)	4
Choices	1
Citizens Advice	1
CCTV – Lay Panel of Visitors	3 (3 substitutes)
Cyclopark	1
Dartford and Gravesham Community Safety Partnership	1 (1 substitute)
Dartford and Gravesham District Partnership Group	1
DGSM Your Choice	1
Ebbsfleet UDC Board	1
Ebbsfleet UDC Planning Committee	1
Elizabeth Huggins Cottages Charity	6
Gravesend & District Mencap Society	2
Gravesend Regatta Committee	3
Gravesham Access Group	1
Gravesham Arts Council and Executive Committee	3
Gravesham Community Leisure Limited	2
Gravesham Rights of Way Committee	3
Henry Pinnocks Charity (4 year term)	5
Kent County Playing Fields Association	1
Kent Downs Area Outstanding Natural Beauty	1

Outside Body	Membership Level
Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel	1
Local Government Association	1
Local Government Information Unit	1
Meopham Community Sports and Leisure Association Management Committee	2
North Kent Crime Prevention Panel	1
North Kent Marshes Internal Drainage Board	3
North Kent Relate	1
North West Kent Volunteer Centre	1
Rosherville Ltd	3
Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS)	1 (1 substitute)
South East Employers	1 (1 substitute)
The Grand Community Interest Company	2
Town Twinning Association	2

Note: The Council does not hold information on the level of involvement, number of meetings, preparation time etc.

FUTURE GOVERNANCE

A strong governance and scrutiny structure underpins the committees of the council without being overly complex and this is regarded as a key strength of Gravesham. As this is the case there is no intention to radically change the current structure. One specific strength is the Cabinet sub-committee model, which enables elected Members the opportunity to effectively discuss and debate differing views and opinions on key topics presented by officers and partner agencies, and ultimately advise Cabinet Members in their decision-making.

Reports considered by Cabinet are frequently taken to the relevant sub-committees to seek Members views and help shape the formation of future policy. Currently there are Six Cabinet Sub Committees (each has 10 seats)

- Commercial Services
- Community & Leisure
- Housing Services
- Operational Services
- Performance & Administration
- Strategic Environment

These committees are valuable, but the membership size of all six committees could be reduced to support the future work of the committees. Currently 37% of all committee seats needing allocation to political groups are for these six committees alone. It is felt that reducing the membership size of all these committees from 10 to 7 members would result in more focussed discussion and would crucially support the recommendation of a reduction from 44 to 39 members without resulting in any increase to the committee workload of a member (which is only one part of their overall workload).

Analysis has been undertaken in order to understand the average number of committees currently attended by Members and the impact that a change in council size, along with a change in the membership to the Cabinet committees would have:

- Table one shows that currently, with 44 Members, the average number of committees attended by Members is 3.68 (highlighted in yellow). Should there be a reduction in council size to 39 with no other changes to committee sizes this would increase to 4.15 committees (highlighted in green).

- Table two shows that reducing the number of seats on the Cabinet Committees to 7 (instead of 10) would remove a total of 18 membership positions to be allocated. This, coupled with reducing the overall council size to 39 Members would have a negligible impact on the average number of committees attended by elected Members; an average of 3.69 meetings (highlighted in green).

Gravesham Borough Council

Table One – Allocation of Committee Seats now with different Council Size

Committee	No. Places on Committee															
Cabinet	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Cabinet Sub Committees	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
Overview Scrutiny Committee	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Finance & Audit Committee	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Licensing Committee	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Licensing Panel	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Planning Committee	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Hackney Carriage Sub-Committee	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Standards Committee	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Appointments Board	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Appointments Panel	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Appeals Sub-Committee	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Gravesham Joint Transportation Board	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Total Committee Places	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**	**162**
Number of Members	**35**	**36**	**37**	**38**	**39**	**40**	**41**	**42**	**43**	**44**	**45**	**46**	**47**	**48**	**49**	**50**
Average Number of Committees per Member	**4.63**	**4.50**	**4.38**	**4.26**	**4.15**	**4.05**	**3.95**	**3.86**	**3.77**	**3.68**	**3.60**	**3.52**	**3.45**	**3.38**	**3.31**	**3.24**

Table 2 – Allocation of Committee Seats with reduction of sub-committee size to 7 with different Council Size

Committee	**No. Places on Committee**															
Cabinet	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Cabinet Sub Committees	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
Overview Scrutiny Committee	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Finance & Audit Committee	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Licensing Committee	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Licensing Panel	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Planning Committee	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Hackney Carriage Sub-Committee	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Standards Committee	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Appointments Board	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Appointments Panel	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Appeals Sub-Committee	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Gravesham Joint Transportation Board	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Total Committee Places	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**	**144**
Number of Members	**35**	**36**	**37**	**38**	**39**	**40**	**41**	**42**	**43**	**44**	**45**	**46**	**47**	**48**	**49**	**50**
Average Number of Committees per Member	**4.11**	**4.00**	**3.89**	**3.79**	**3.69**	**3.60**	**3.51**	**3.43**	**3.35**	**3.27**	**3.20**	**3.13**	**3.06**	**3.00**	**2.94**	**2.88**

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

This section concentrates on the wider nature of the role of elected councillors as community representatives; demonstrating the workload of Members beyond the formal meetings and governance requirements of the council itself and, in doing so, outlining the aspiration for the council's Member base to be truly representative of the community they serve.

Being an effective councillor is a significant commitment. The requirement to balance the varied and often sensitive needs of residents and community groups, political party interests and the strategic vision and sustainability of the authority itself brings with it considerable demands on a councillor's time – responsibilities additional to those of professional occupations and personal lives.

Through the work of the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group in preparing this submission, supported by the results of a survey of Gravesham's Members, it is considered that Gravesham's Members are particularly proactive in undertaking their responsibilities. With a strong culture for advocacy and an evident range of integral outside bodies to support, signpost and promote represented communities, Gravesham has a Member base that takes great pride in fulfilling its elected duty.

This community-focussed section of the submission will dissect the work and methods used by local councillors, whilst also considering the nature and scale of support offered by the council to effectively facilitate the role. It will also identify the potential impact any change to Member numbers may present to the future sustainability of the role, particularly in light of the long-term societal impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Involvement – Gravesham Members

In developing this submission, a survey of Gravesham's Members was undertaken to provide detailed insight into their role and responsibilities and to gain an understanding of how constituent business is undertaken alongside the channels utilised by stakeholders to engage with their elected representative. The results of the Member survey are referenced throughout this section.

Responsibilities

The council's Constitution details the role and expectations of elected Members. As acknowledged by the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group, these essential duties can be summarised as follows:

- Play an active role in representing their communities and encouraging citizen involvement in policy decision-making;
- Dealing with individual casework fairly and impartially whist advocating on behalf of constituents in resolving concerns;
- Balance competing interests within the ward whilst representing the ward as a whole;
- Represent residents and the council more broadly by direct membership or attendance of other partnership bodies; and

- Maintain the highest standard of conduct and ethics in keeping with the Seven Principles of Public Life and the Member Code of Conduct.

- In delivering these duties, Appendix 5 presents the range of community focussed responsibilities and competing interests involved with the role of a local councillor, as identified by work of the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group and informed by the findings of the Member survey;

  "The public now expect much greater ward-based leadership meaning that councillors have to be engaged in all matters and have enhanced knowledge of all local groups and organisations at ward level."

Contact

On review of the results of the Member survey, the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group acknowledged how different councillors facing differing resident demographic demands discharge the role of a Member in increasingly diverse ways.

Despite those variances, at its heart community business for Gravesham's Members was identified through the survey as being most frequently conducted across the following channels:

- Personal: dealing with queries and engaging with constituents either face to face in constituent surgeries or through telephone contact helps develop the portfolio of Member knowledge and often leads to follow-up activity in resolving and concluding personal issues. To a lesser degree, face to face contact is also identified in door-knocking/canvassing activities that can result in casework being presented.
- Digital: digital channels have become increasingly important in recent times for Gravesham's councillors and are expected to grow further. Practically, digital opportunities involve responding to enquiries received via multiple platforms (email, social media etc), hosting meetings (e.g. Zoom) and, equally, proactively maintaining blogs/websites and social media accounts to advertise representative content.

Appendix 6 presents the results of the Member survey undertaken for this submission. The findings for Questions 7-9 identify the contact channels promoted and used both by Members themselves and the preferences of local constituents within Gravesham.

Of interest here is the almost direct correlation between the popularity of contact channels promoted by Members for constituents to use and those actually utilised for business. The main difference identified being that letters are disproportionately promoted for use. Constituent's preferential form of contact is via email, as is the channel utilised by Members themselves to undertake casework.

Also of note is that despite the advances of modern digital channels, 72% of respondents to the Member survey felt that ward surgeries would remain an important component in the delivery of constituent business over the next 5 years.

Demand

Fundamental to this review is an understanding of the time and resource demands upon local councillors within Gravesham and, therefore, what impact any change to Member numbers may present both to the sustainability of the role and the council's future operations.

Each councillor works in their own way and time demands will therefore vary depending on the degree of visibility volunteered to constituents e.g. frequency of ward surgeries.

Outside of Member's personal preference in undertaking the role, there are key drivers to the different levels of demand experienced by Gravesham's elected representatives. For example, the differing socio-economic profile across the borough can generate increased frequency and complexity in caseloads in certain areas e.g. urban-based councillors are more frequently involved in housing/homelessness requests for intervention. Demonstrating Gravesham's variances, one such example from the Member survey stated;

"I represent a deprived area, the casework I am involved with is very complex and I then deal with many other agencies which again takes up more time."

Of equal importance to the direct constituent demands upon Members are the variances that are established as a result of differing formal responsibilities. As an example, for Gravesham's rural Members, if not directly elected, this can include attendance at local Parish Councils. This additional responsibility requires those elected councillors having to identify appropriate time and resource to attend relevant meetings and appropriately represent the specific needs and interests of their rural constituents.

As a result of such differences, there is no 'one size fits all' model or set time expectation for Gravesham Members to work to.

Unquestionably, the role and demands upon elected councillors in Gravesham have evolved significantly since the last boundary review exercise in 2001. Advances in modern technology and the council's digital offer mean residents are much more readily able to 'self-serve'. By sourcing answers to questions via the council's digital platforms, in many instances constituents are able to resolve queries without the support of a local councillor.

Conversely however, the increased provision of digital channels, such as social media and email, whilst reducing the need for face to face contact, has additionally presented a more accessible platform for enhanced scrutiny of Members. As evident in the findings of the Member survey, any content and material received through these digital channels requires consideration and response, and comes with the expectation this should be undertaken at any given time of day, albeit it is recognised the advent of digital channels also provides the opportunity to tackle issues before they might have traditionally escalated into formal queries;

"I do not recommend social media, but recognise how active various parts of the Ward and Borough are on social media. Therefore, it is important to monitor social media and often I will pick up on housing issues and intervene to deal with them preventing the 'legs' of issues gaining pace."

In seeking to evidence conclusions as to demands upon Gravesham councillors, and therefore the potential impact any structural change may present, this council size submission draws upon two relatively recent formal sources:

- GBC: Independent Remuneration Panel, Survey of Members (2017)
  The council established an Independent Remuneration Panel in order to make informed recommendations into the various allowances available to councillors for undertaking both formal council business (e.g. committee meetings) and constituent work within their respective wards.
- Integral to this review was a survey of councillors that indicated the median figure for hours spent undertaking council business was 15 per week, albeit with variations relating to the level of responsibilities. The Panel concluded the mean weekly average for Gravesham's Members was 12.5 hours.
- LGA: National Census of Local Authority Councillors (2018)
  The LGA's latest available Census of local councillors presented the same question to Members of all authorities at each tier of local government. The findings of the 2018 study indicate the national average amount of time spent each week by councillors was 22 hours – a figure in line with all other recent LGA Censuses.

  Even accounting for alternative responsibilities associated with councillors of upper tier authorities, this outturn is significantly in advance of the average 12.5 hours established by the council's Independent Remuneration Panel a year previous.

Therefore the nature of queries and the channels used to present them to councillors may have changed, but the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group acknowledged that the volume of existing formal and informal business for Gravesham Members has neither significantly increased nor dramatically reduced in recent years.

Crucially, the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group also concluded the time spent on council business within the existing Member base was below the comparative national average, albeit with acknowledged variance across the differing roles held by Members in the council's governance structure.

Future

This section to the submission has concentrated on the current or existing role and methods used by Gravesham Members. In order to provide a rounded and 'future-proof' conclusion to any potential amendments to Member numbers in the authority, it is also required of this exercise to consider what community representation may involve in years to come and the demands this may present.

The Coronavirus pandemic has had the most profound impact on the daily lives of UK residents since the second world war; significant societal restrictions on movement and association, coupled with intense harm to the national economy through the enforced closure of businesses and an inevitable loss of jobs. Throughout the pandemic, Gravesham Members have played a vital role at the heart of their own communities, offering advice and support (e.g. ensuring essential food and medical supplies) and encouraging virtual community engagement opportunities.

Collectively, the impact of Coronavirus is one of significant damage to the health and well-being of the Gravesham community. Equally, it presents a substantial challenge both to the sustainability of the council and its essential frontline community services and, critically, the role of its elected representatives.

Councils will be central to local recovery plans for communities and, as evident through the Member survey, demand for support and representation from constituents is likely to increase as the recovery takes hold;

"I think there will be even more need from residents for support during and post COVID with the financial and housing issues this will cause."

"I anticipate that following the pandemic there will be a surge in the creation and need to facilitate local forums. In many areas of my ward, communities have come together and I can only see this being extended and formalised in the future."

What the Coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated in Gravesham is how vital the role of effective elected Members as community representatives is. Moreover, given the scale of challenge facing residents and businesses within the borough in future years, it is essential that Gravesham continues to receive effective and proportionate support from their elected representatives.

As such, it was felt by the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group that a large and disproportionate reduction in the number of councillors would be to the detriment of constituents in such a challenging future environment. Such a position would not support an effective and convenient local government structure within the borough.

Support

In order to effectively deliver their elected responsibilities council officers provide a comprehensive support package to Gravesham Members, including but not exclusive to:

- Development
  Administered by the council's Committee Services team, all new and returning Gravesham Members are provided with a full induction process following election. The team also delivers a sustained central support offer during a councillor's tenure.

  Key to the induction process is a wide-ranging annual training programme, varying dependent on Member needs and legislative demands. In 2019-20, 30 sessions were delivered covering a range of mandatory and voluntary educational topics. Gravesham's Member support programme is highly regarded, both internally by councillors and externally, having recently been identified by an LGA Peer Challenge Review as a positive case study of best practice.

- Resources
  As part of our Transformation programme, the council has made significant progress in recent times in moving to a paperless and more agile working environment. Members are supported in this area through the provision of iPad/tablets, complete with access to the Mod.Gov App. which enables instant access to committee agendas and the ability to store and readily transport meeting papers. Delivered with an appropriate training offer, this functionality has proved incredibly important during the Coronavirus pandemic, where all council meetings have been conducted remotely – a situation that has overseen increased Member attendance levels.

Representation

In seeking to represent a community, it is widely accepted that to be truly informed and to obtain the required insight into the problems, priorities and opportunities of local residents, the ability to call upon a Member base of equally diverse background is a key component to local democracy.

- Ethnic minority representation
  A recent study by the University of Manchester (*Ethnic Minority Representation in UK Local Government*: 2020) presented that, on a national level, BME communities are disproportionately underrepresent in terms of the ethnic diversity of their local councillors. Although Gravesham is in advance of the national figure of 7% of councillors of ethnic minority background, the council is currently operating below its local figure of 22% of residents identifying as 'non-White British', with the expectation this disparity will grow with the results of the 2021 Census.
- Female representation
  Women have traditionally been underrepresented in local government. Although accounting for 51% of the national population, the LGA's 2018 Census of local councillors identified that only 36% of all Members were female. Female underrepresentation is even more acute within Gravesham, where women account for only 28% of elected Members.

In working towards the make-up of a future Gravesham Borough Council, and in seeking to deliver on our own Corporate Plan commitment of developing a cohesive and resilient community, this project therefore presents a significant opportunity. Given the historic and well-documented barriers that have existed to recruiting Members from underrepresented groups, a slight reduction in Member numbers to 39 has the potential to progressively move the council towards a more accurate and reflective demographic – truly representative of the diverse local community it serves.

To practically deliver on this opportunity of a greater demographic balance within the Member base, the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group collectively formed the following recommendations:

- that Gravesham's political groups work towards a more considered approach in their respective selection processes with a view to delivering candidates that represent the borough's community identity; and
- as a means for enabling greater opportunity for involvement, a review be carried out into Member's working practices (e.g. meeting times) as part of the council's new Equality Policy action plan.

The Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group concluded that implementation of such initiatives to attract prospective new Members, combined with a slightly reduced overall Member base, provides a strong commitment towards achieving a higher proportion of currently underrepresented community groups and, therefore, a council more representative of its fast-evolving local population.

Conclusion: What does this mean for future council size?

The content in this section of the submission evidences the significant responsibility and demands required of Gravesham's elected Members as community representatives and the channels used to discharge these responsibilities.

In light of available material and the considerations of the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group into the role of a modern day councillor, it is concluded that a small reduction in Member numbers to 39 is unlikely to present a significant impact to the ability of Gravesham Members to properly deliver on their elected responsibilities – certainly not one that would be out of keeping with that evidently experienced by councillors in other district councils nationally. Reducing the council-size to 39 and reducing the membership on the Cabinet Committees would have a near-neutral impact on the average number of committees each Member would be required to attend.

A move to 39 Members also has the potential to move the Member base towards a more accurate and reflective demographic; a council effectively representing the needs and expectations of all local residents, particularly when supported by the suggested considerations given to recruitment policies and working practices as identified by the Electoral Review Cross-party Working Group.

Conversely, a large reduction has the potential to adversely impact the role of Gravesham's Members and the ability to sustain the role as effective community representatives into the future. This is especially true in consideration of the likely long-term societal impact brought about through the Coronavirus pandemic and, as identified through the Member survey, the need for increased community representation to address such challenges (housing, benefits, economic etc.).

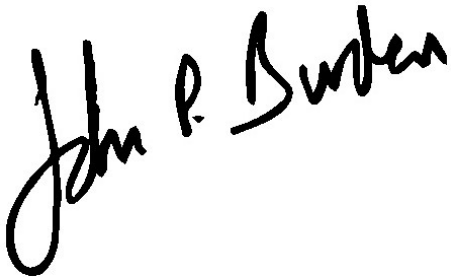
Such pressures would also question the ability to recruit new councillors in future years, with the role becoming increasingly unattractive – particularly of interest in Gravesham given the already underrepresented groups within the council's Member base.

Specifically, in addressing the Boundary Commission's objectives, key findings include:

Boundary Commission Objectives	**Gravesham**
Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.	• Below average demands on time: Whilst the role of a councillor has become more diverse with multiple contact channels now available, advances in technology have enabled time demands on Members to operate below those experienced on average across other local authorities. A slight reduction in Member numbers to 39 would therefore bring Gravesham closer to national average representation levels. Such a move would have minimal impact to existing demands and would ensure the role remains attractive into the future.

Boundary Commission Objectives	Gravesham
Ensuring that recommendations reflect community identity.	• Largest BME population in Kent: with an under-represented BME Member base, a small reduction in Members to 39, in conjunction with proposals for progressive recruitment policies, would deliver a more proportionately representative council. • Underrepresentation of women: with a rate of female representation below both that of the resident population and the equivalent national council average, a small reduction to 39 Members, complemented by a proposed review of working practices, has the potential to deliver a council more reflective of the community it serves.

A collaborative submission on behalf of the Member Cross-party Working Group:



Councillor John Burden

Leader of the Council

Councillor Jordan Meade

Shadow Leader and Leader of the Conservative Group

Councillor Harold Craske

Leader of the Independent Group

Supporting Appendices

1. Gravesham – Administrative and Geographical Boundaries

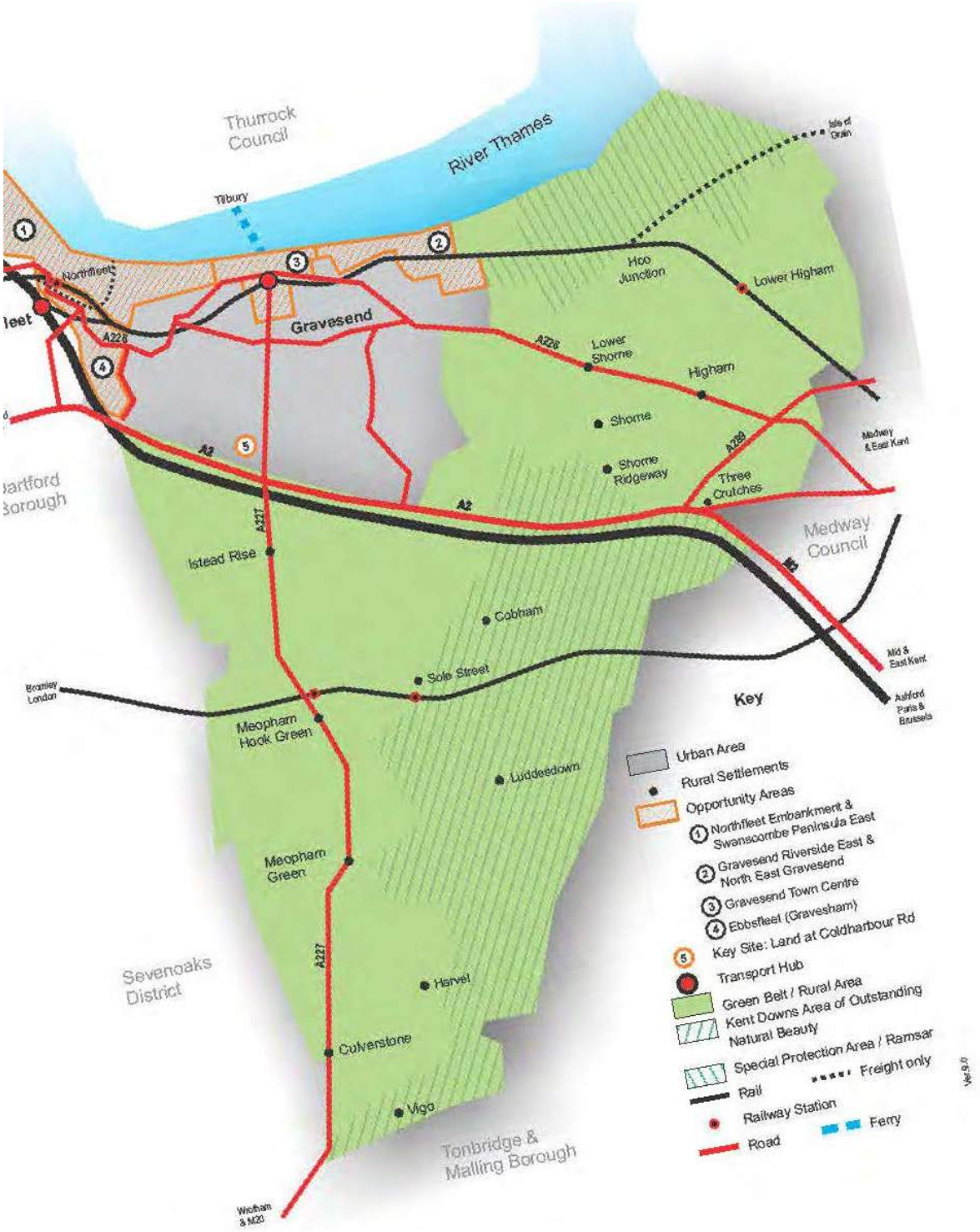
2. Gravesham Elector Numbers

3. English Indices of Deprivation 2019 – Gravesham Profile

4. Gravesham 'Quality of Life' Analysis

5. Members - Community focussed responsibilities

6. Role of Councillors as community representatives – survey responses


Thurrock Council
River Thames
Tilbury
Northfleet
Gravesend
A226
A2
A3
A227
A289
Hoo Junction
Lower Higham
Higham
Lower Shorne
Shorne
Shorne Ridgeway
Three Crutches
Istead Rise
Cobham
Sole Street
Meopham
Hook Green
Meopham Green
Luddesdown
Harvel
Culverstone
Vigo
Medway Council
Sevenoaks District
Tonbridge & Malling Borough
Bromley London
Mid & East Kent
Ashford Paris & Brussels
Medway & East Kent
Wrotham & M20
Key
Urban Area
Rural Settlements
Opportunity Areas
1 Northfleet Embankment & Swanscombe Peninsula East
2 Gravesend Riverside East & North East Gravesend
3 Gravesend Town Centre
4 Ebbsfleet (Gravesham)
5 Key Site: Land at Coldharbour Rd
Transport Hub
Green Belt / Rural Area
Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Special Protection Area / Ramsar
Rail
Freight only
Railway Station
Road
Ferry

Elector Numbers

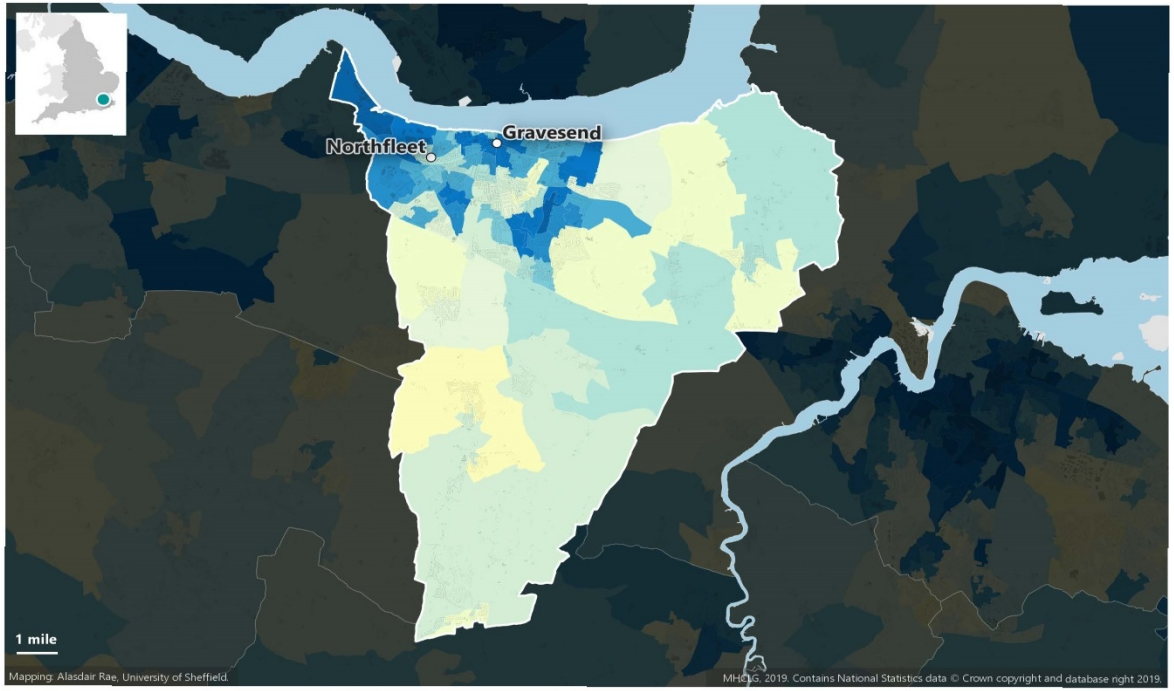
The table below details the electorate in 2020 and the associated variance in the elector v councillor ratio in each ward.

Name of ward	Number of Cllrs per ward	Electors Per Councillor	Electorate (2020)	Elector/Cllr Variance 2020
Central	3	1,677	5,030	-4%
Chalk	1	1,782	1,782	2%
Coldharbour	2	1,702	3,404	-2%
Higham	2	1,595	3,190	-8%
Istead Rise	2	1,393	2,786	-20%
Meopham North	2	1,746	3,492	0%
Meopham South and Vigo	2	1,747	3,493	0%
Northfleet North	3	1,814	5,442	4%
Northfleet South	3	2,017	6,051	16%
Painters Ash	3	1,452	4,357	-16%
Pelham	3	1,790	5,371	3%
Riverside	3	2,040	6,119	17%
Riverview	2	1,675	3,349	-4%
Shorne,Cobham and Luddesdown	2	1,654	3,307	-5%
Singlewell	3	1,916	5,748	10%
Westcourt	3	1,641	4,924	-6%
Whitehill	2	1,693	3,386	-3%
Woodlands	3	1,756	5,269	1%
Totals	**44**	**1,739**	**76,500**	

English Indices of Deprivation 2019

Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government

GRAVESHAM


Northfleet
Gravesend
1 mile
Mapping: Alasdair Rae, University of Sheffield.
MHCLG, 2019. Contains National Statistics data © Crown copyright and database right 2019.

Local deprivation profile

% of LSOAs in each national deprivation decile

MORE DEPRIVED

1	3.1%
2	15.6%
3	9.4%
4	15.6%
5	6.3%
6	12.5%
7	15.6%
8	6.3%
9	12.5%
10	3.1%

LESS DEPRIVED

What this map shows

This is a map of Indices of Deprivation 2019 data for **Gravesham**. The colours on the map indicate the deprivation decile of each Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) for England as a whole, and the coloured bars above indicate the proportion of LSOAs in each national deprivation decile. The most deprived areas (decile 1) are shown in blue. It is important to keep in mind that the Indices of Deprivation relate to small areas and do not tell us how deprived, or wealthy, individual people are. LSOAs have an average population of just under 1,700 (as of 2017).

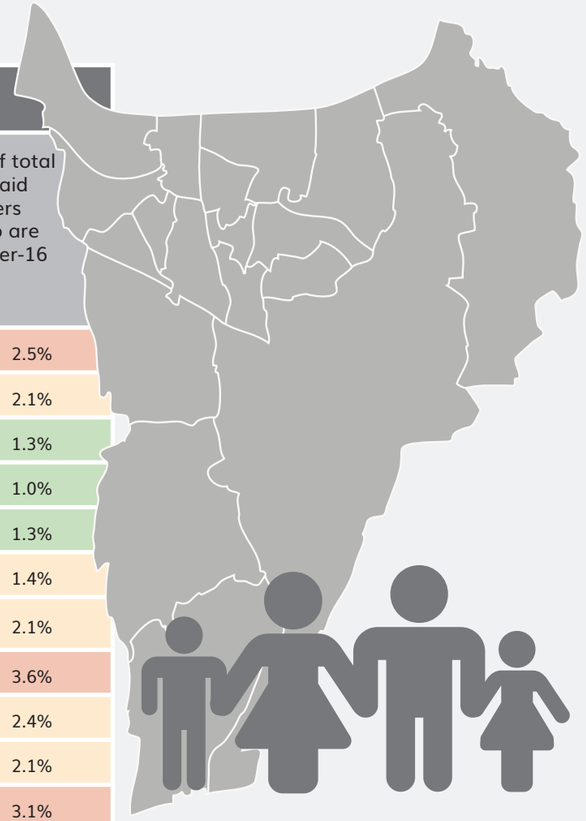
More deprived — Less deprived

Relative level of deprivation

Appendix Three

Gravesham 'Quality of Life' Analysis

Gravesham Electoral Wards	People	Crime	Deprivation			Education	Health			
	All people aged 16+ in household have English as a main language	Total recorded crime/1,000 hd of population	% unemployed	Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019		% of people with a 'Level 4' (or above) qualification	Average male life expectancy (years)	Average female life expectancy (years)	People declared as 'good health' or above	% of total unpaid carers who are under-16
				Average LSOA Score: Rank	Barriers to housing and services: Rank					
Central	82.4%	115	9.6%	8	9	25.5%	78.3	82.6	81.5%	2.5%
Chalk	97.9%	60	5.4%	14	2	18.9%	83.1	88.6	80.5%	2.1%
Coldharbour	94.4%	104	8.0%	3	13	13.2%	76.0	81.2	76.6%	1.3%
Higham	97.4%	60	4.8%	12	8	22.3%	80.6	84.1	81.0%	1.0%
Istead Rise	98.6%	34	4.1%	16	17	22.0%	82.8	87.8	82.1%	1.3%
Meopham North	98.1%	50	3.3%	18	6	29.9%	83.2	85.9	84.6%	1.4%
Meopham South and Vigo	98.1%	59	4.4%	15	3	26.5%	82.3	84.5	85.4%	2.1%
Northfleet North	85.2%	131	10.2%	4	5	16.3%	77.2	81.3	81.8%	3.6%
Northfleet South	88.1%	159	7.5%	7	15	18.2%	80.8	80.9	82.7%	2.4%
Painters Ash	95.4%	86	5.9%	10	12	15.3%	77.8	81.2	76.2%	2.1%
Pelham	75.5%	266	9.9%	6	10	22.9%	76.6	83.6	79.9%	3.1%
Riverside	79.7%	159	11.4%	2	4	19.4%	76.5	82.8	83.3%	4.1%
Riverview	96.7%	43	3.8%	17	18	17.6%	89.9	85.6	84.7%	1.1%
Shorne, Cobham and Luddesdown	96.6%	63	4.1%	13	1	27.5%	78.5	88.4	83.4%	1.8%
Singlewell	96.2%	82	8.1%	5	11	12.4%	76.7	85.3	79.7%	3.0%
Westcourt	95.4%	93	8.9%	1	7	13.7%	76.9	84.4	78.7%	2.5%
Whitehill	94.0%	128	7.2%	9	16	18.5%	82.1	81.9	81.8%	0.9%
Woodlands	93.7%	88	5.8%	11	14	24.6%	82.6	82.6	83.9%	1.2%



Key	
	Least challenged
	Mid-point
	Most challenged

Members - Community focussed responsibilities

Category	Activity
Serving constituents	- Assisting and advising constituents at councillor surgeries. - Signposting constituents to appropriate help and support. - Attending community and resident-led meetings. - Assist constituents with appeals and complaints against the council and assist with mediation to resolve local disputes (e.g. ASB). - Assist constituents with appeals and complaints against other public bodies. - Lead ward walkabouts, organise events. - Undertaking site visits of planning applications. - Reading, preparation time and travel to and from the above. - Lobby MP, government or other parties on behalf of constituent interests. - Participate in party political functions relating to the ward (e.g. selection procedures, distributing of election materials, canvassing).
Representing the community	- Attendance at meetings of bodies on which a councillor is not necessarily a nominated or elected council representative, but for which participation advances the interests of the local community (e.g. Parish Council). - Membership of community groups, residents associations, tenant groups, local campaign groups and any related positions of responsibility. - Support and participation with community facilities/projects. - Acting as community leaders, lobbying or attending meetings to address bodies on behalf of the local community.
Representing the council	- Participation with outside bodies on which the council is invited to have a nominated representative and all related preparations. - Attendance at pre-meetings, officer briefings and formal meetings of outside groups. - Chair (or hold other positions) on outside bodies. - Undertake a range of supporting tasks to the outside bodies to which the councillor is representing the council e.g. reading reports, informal meetings, events, promotional activities. - Reading reports, preparation time and travel time.

Boundary Review: Role of Councillors as community representatives

- **Survey Responses**

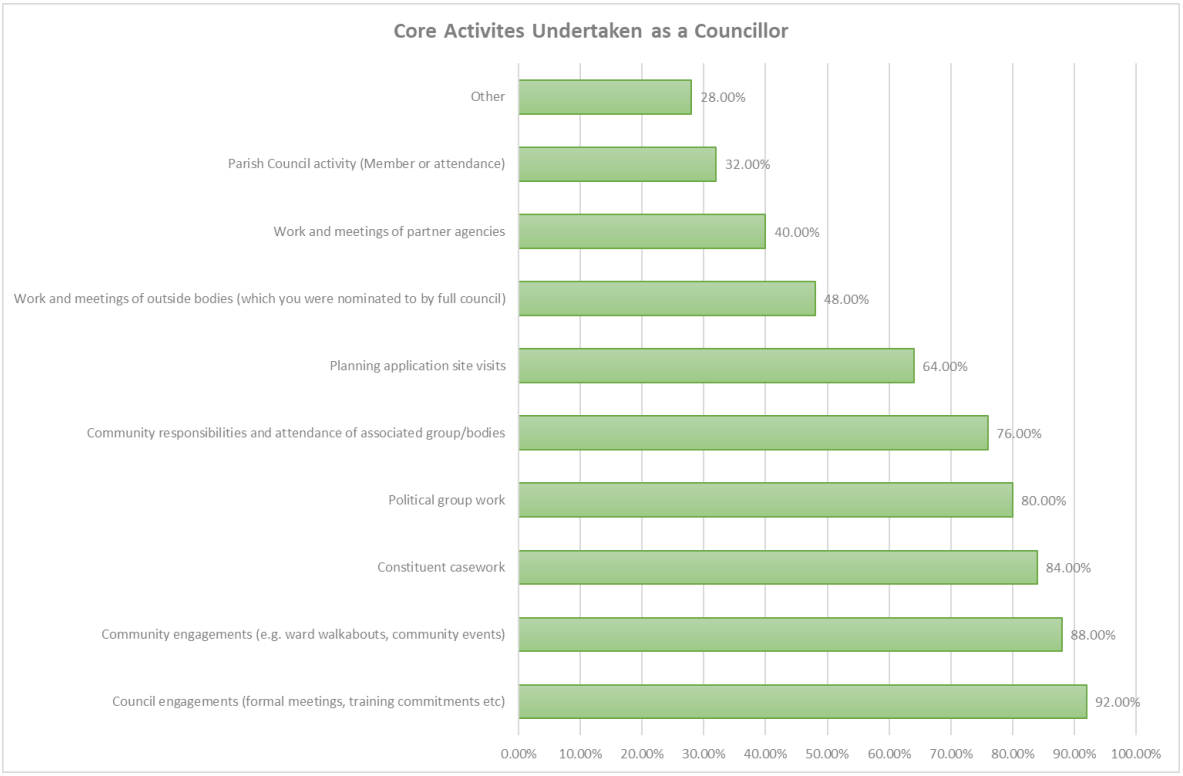
Total number of respondents to the survey: 25 (58.14% response rate)

2. Do you undertake any of the following responsibilities in your elected role? Please select all that apply.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Cabinet Member	13.80% (4)
Shadow Cabinet Member	17.24% (5)
Chair of a Committee	31.02% (9)
None of the above	37.93% (11)

The responses above provide a relatively good split of Members in terms of their roles on the Council. There is a good mix of Cabinet/Shadow Cabinet as well as Committee Chairs and backbench Members.

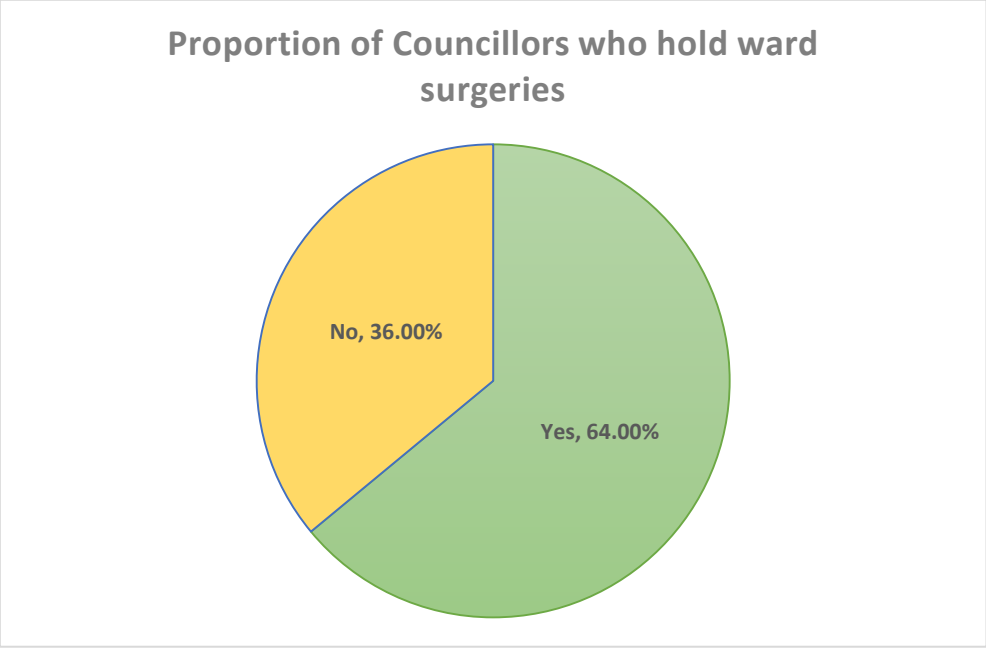
3. What are the core activities you undertake as a Councillor for Gravesham? Please select any of the following that apply and use the free text box for any other activities you are involved with.



Other:

- Briefings, draft papers etc
- Also meetings with Kent County Council, the Police, Highways England, and Lower Thames Crossing. Member of the Council Planning Committee, Member of Gravesham Joint Transport Board.
- Lga board
- I spend a great deal of time dealing with issues from electors that does not always mean my needing to speak with or deal with officers. However, the time I spend on constituency work in the community means I need support in printing materials and leaflets.
- Hold regular evening meetings in halls to meet constituents
- I will often visit constituents for feedback after their casework has been dealt with and walk the ward to ensure any fly tipping or other concerns by residents are reported
- Chair of Rosherville Board

4. Do you hold ward surgeries to interact with and advise constituents?

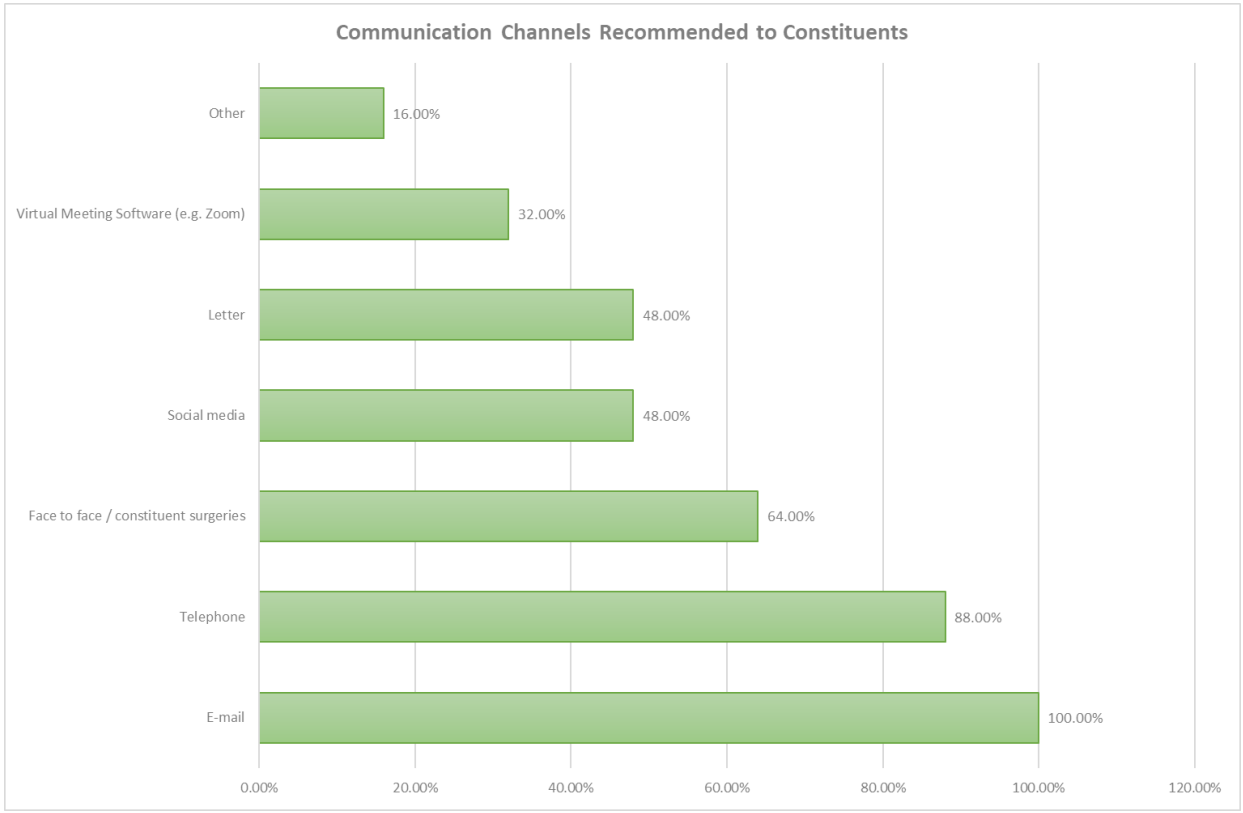


In terms of frequency:

- **One** member holds weekly surgeries
- **Five** held monthly surgeries
- **Four** hold quarterly surgeries
- **Eight** hold surgeries on various frequencies (ad hoc as required, six monthly)

72.22% (13 out of 18 responders to this question) of respondents felt that ward surgeries would remain important in delivering ward business over the next 5 years.

7. Which channels do you recommend constituents use in order to contact you? Please select any of the following that apply and use the free text box for any other specified channels.



Other:

- Despite encouraging constituents to contact me by phone or email, a number of constituents choose to contact me by social media, and a smaller number contact me by letter. I am also available for face to face meetings. I also give a report of my Council activities at monthly parish council meetings (which is shown on publicised agendas). These meetings are open to the public (including by Zoom during the pandemic), but members of the public seldom attend.
- I do not recommend social media, but recognise how active various parts of the Ward and Borough are on social media. Therefore, it is important to monitor social media and often I will pick up on housing issues and intervene to deal with them preventing the 'legs' of issues gaining pace. Some residents prefer to write letters and that is fine. It is so important for all areas of communication to be available to Gravesham Borough residents. Ward and Borough are on social media. Therefore, it is important to monitor social media - and often I will pick up on housing issues and intervene to deal with them preventing the 'legs' of issues gaining pace.
- Talk to me in the street
- If we had Teams and adequate training for this we could arrange to meet with residents it would be helpful to have two screens to do this as I can then refer to information whilst meeting with residents.

8. In order of demand, which channels do CONSTITUENTS prefer to use to contact you? (based on 23 responses):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Score
E-mail	73.91% 17	17.39% 4	8.70% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	23	5.65
Telephone	13.04% 3	34.78% 8	43.48% 10	0.00% 0	4.35% 1	4.35% 1	23	4.39
Face to face / constituent surgeries	0.00% 0	17.39% 4	30.43% 7	30.43% 7	17.39% 4	4.35% 1	23	3.39
Social media	13.04% 3	17.39% 4	4.35% 1	21.74% 5	30.43% 7	13.04% 3	23	3.22
Virtual Meeting Software (e.g. Zoom)	0.00% 0	8.70% 2	4.35% 1	21.74% 5	26.09% 6	39.13% 9	23	2.17
Letter	0.00% 0	4.35% 1	8.70% 2	26.09% 6	21.74% 5	39.13% 9	23	2.17

9. In order of demand, which channels do YOU use to undertake and respond to constituent casework? (based on 23 responses)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Score
Email	69.57% 16	21.74% 5	8.70% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	23	5.61
Telephone	17.39% 4	39.13% 9	21.74% 5	8.70% 2	4.35% 1	8.70% 2	23	4.30
Face to face / constituent surgeries	8.70% 2	13.04% 3	39.13% 9	21.74% 5	13.04% 3	4.35% 1	23	3.70
Social media	4.35% 1	13.04% 3	21.74% 5	30.43% 7	17.39% 4	13.04% 3	23	3.17
Letter	0.00% 0	13.04% 3	0.00% 0	26.09% 6	8.70% 2	52.17% 12	23	2.13
Virtual Meeting Software (e.g. Zoom)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8.70% 2	13.04% 3	56.52% 13	21.74% 5	23	2.09

12. How do you think your role as a Councillor is likely to change in the future (i.e. What are the demands you expect to see from constituents, businesses, community groups and how will these likely shape your responsibilities)?

- Not sure - still getting used to the types of enquiries coming via constituents.
- What I have experienced from my case work is that there would be more demand for co-ordinated support. Residents don't want to go to different authorities and find out who's relevant e.g. parking issues , if those involves Police/DVLA, residents wants action taken by local authority. I understand local authority restrictions however, there is demand for multiple agency group to deal such issues. Again with expedited digital world and shrinking work-home life balances and time, the expectations from us would be, to be at the forefront of emerging technologies and less hassles reaching out to councillor's or officers.
- I am unsure how things may progress. The review of Local Government will definitely bring changes.
- There is a growing demand for councillors to advise and represent constituents . The work load is increasing especially if the councillor is to do justice to the constituents.
- The pandemic has caused Councillors to be that much more central to the running their wards. The public now expect much greater ward-based leadership meaning that Councillors have to be engaged in all matters and have enhanced knowledge of all local groups and organisations at ward level. Councillors are now expected to intervene on Planning Applications much earlier on in the process and more and more residents are asking that their Councillors become proactive in raising their concerns before an application hits the Planning Committee. Being a councillor is about being completely absorbed in community life, leading litter picking and planting events or being seen at the local Church Council is becoming just as important as attending Council meetings. Residents expect to see and hear from their councillors and this want will only increase over the coming years. I anticipate that following the pandemic there will be a surge in the creation and need to facilitate local forums. In many areas of my ward, communities have come together and I can only see this being extended and formalised in the future.
- Because of Covid 19, just the emails and phone is the only way of communication for the near future.
- They expect quick replies but our inbox are full of LG 'stuff' that 90% is deletable. They want us to have access to local info on hand and represent them so training in all aspects of that would be useful.
- People expect more and more to be part of the decision making process and to be provided with information and reasons for decisions. They are also subject to fake new and misrepresenting of facts - I see the Councillor role as being key in a baling residents and businesses to engage meaningfully and to reduce the likelihood of dissatisfaction with democracy at best and disengagement and civil unrest at worst.
- With instant technology it has increased the demand for instant responses, but many Cllrs work during the day and have caring commitments, we must support cllrs in their day to day life too as being a Cllr sadly isn't paid to be a full time job, even though it can be all time consuming. There are two major arms of the responsibilities, one the case work and helping individuals or small areas which takes time and work to organise street clean ups or for tackling antisocial behaviour etc, two is the formal meetings side which can make a big impact to residents in that area but cllrs may not have the time to recognise or work on this given the demands of case work. Casework also seems to be

very disproportionate to certain areas which then has a knock on affect to the time to be spent on strategically improving the area. I represent a deprived area, the casework I am involved with is very complex and I then deal with many other agencies which again takes up more time. An understanding of this need should then be supported with officers. Some. Cllrs are drowning under casework.

- I think there will be even more need from residents for support during and post COVID with the financial and housing issues this will cause. More training and support with dealing with these specific problems will be important.
- If anything it will be more involved. Unlike just 20 years ago people expect their Councillors to be on hand 24 hours a day 7 days a week and to resolve issues for them faster no matter the costs or the complexity of the issue. Reality is different and this disconnect has to be addressed.
- Constituents bad businesses still value the representative role of a Councillor. But increasingly they feel Councils and Councillors have little or no power to make policy or change things for the better. A strong feeling that central and Regional Government now see local Councils as simple administrative bodies. Certainly a lot of powers of District Councils have been eroded making their role marginal. It has weakened local democracy and the ability to influence change.
- I think that in a post COVID world the caseload from constituents will increase dramatically, particularly when government schemes come to an end.
- Councillors are expected to deal with numerous issues that are not within their remit (such as crime, antisocial behaviour, highways, irresponsible parking, potholes, civil matters, vegetation, etc). This situation will only increase - it is very difficult for constituents to contact Kent County Council, it is difficult for them to contact the Police, impossible to contact Highways England, and they are often dissatisfied with the response to their enquiries or complaints. Residents are very unhappy with what they perceive as the Council's plans to remove land from the Green Belt and to allow unrestricted development on the countryside. Councillors are held responsible for any actions or policies of the Council, even though they may not agree with the policies, they were not part of the decision, and often have not even been briefed. It is therefore inevitable that Councillors will be expected to spend more time on activities not strictly within their area of responsibility, and become more involved in representing residents, businesses, and community groups in their dealings with the Council, purely as a result of being their elected representative.
- Regular communication and being available more on line for meetings.
- All this would mean more training across the board, please. Demand - with rapid response - is going to be greater and even more positive results expected. This means that technology is going to play an even greater role (see No.11).
- I am expecting more social media involvement. Constituents will be using email to contact councillors as This is A quick way to get questions and concerns To us to deal with and a response back to them.
- The pandemic has increased social need but in addition has made it more challenging to meet with constituents in person. Covid risk assessed local venues would help with councillor surgeries, Training on the use of holding virtual meetings and access to an online meeting platform such as zoom or Microsoft teams would enable me to meet virtually with community groups.

- As resources in all LAs and institutions shrink, while electronic access to services increases, along with increasing social media accessibility between community and councillors, my experience is that the community leans heavily on its councillor for signposting and assistance. It isn't just casework any more, its a panoply of activities, omnipresent 24/7. A councillor can choose to be inaccessible, or accessible, so the more s/he opens his/herself up to be accessible, the community will grab this help with both hands!
- I think there will continue to be a demand from a variety of stakeholders and we will need to communicate in various ways including through leaflets which it would be helpful for the council to print. I think further training on how to deal with difficult situation would be helpful.
- I expect to be a lot busier in the coming years, with the advent of all the housing proposed for my Ward. With a possible doubling of the population Assuming 2 adults with 2 children per dwelling or A 50% increase assuming just 2 adults. As you can see this could potentially increase my Workload significantly.
- Demands from residents and community groups are increasing and becoming more demanding. There is pressure from ad hoc groups that spring up from time to time.
- Social Media is for used to pass on information and not for private consultation, unfortunately some don’t understand that Social Media is a very public platform. So, learning the balance between private confidential meetings will be better understood in future.
- Fewer face-to-face meetings with constituents. Fewer councillors means more committee meetings.